Metamorphosis and the management of change

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> ‘Economics are the method; the object is to change the heart and soul’.
>
> Margaret Thatcher, *The Sunday Times*, May 1981

> ‘My mind turns now to human bodies changed
> Into new shapes and forms. Immortal gods,
> Look kindly on what I’m attempting here,
> Itself a change of theme that you inspired’.
>
> Ovid, *Metamorphoses* I, 1-3 (my translation)

ABSTRACT

Talk of educational reform and of the importance of ‘the management of change’ in education as well as other dimensions of public life is still widespread, even if it now has to compete with simplistic, and less humane, ideas about improving education, such as by reading off effective teaching techniques –‘what works’ – from the data. There are oddities in much talk of educational change, not least that it is a euphemism, invariably presaging deterioration in the working conditions of teachers and other education professionals. The literature on the management of change often seems concerned to persuade us that if we engage fully with change rather than resisting it we will find our lives more meaningful, thus omitting what might be thought to be the important matter of the goal of the change in question. In this it resembles various other historical movements for change in coming to identify the process or means of change with its ultimate end. Strangest of all, perhaps, is that recent interest in change seldom deals with the idea of an ever-changing, labile world but is concerned with how to make the transition – and make others make the transition – from one stable condition of things to another. A different way of thinking about change and a different language and literature for doing so might help us grasp the limitations of many of the ways in which we are currently being asked to respond to educational change and reform.

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I

Times Higher Education recently carried a full-page advertisement (10 Sept. 2015, p. 25) in which University of the Arts London declares that a defining feature of its new strategic plan 'is the dedicated change management required to support our entire infrastructure and people development activities … Recognising that change is the only constant at UAL, we require three permanent Directors of Change Management'. Embracing the paradox enthusiastically – or ironically, it would be good to think, for this is a University of the Arts – the advertisement speaks of these as 'truly remarkable opportunities … to join an institution for which change is not an exception, but one of its defining features'. If we take this seriously, change trumps the Arts at UAL, being 'the only constant', and if change isn't going on then it can't be UAL, since change is a 'defining feature' of the institution.

Clearly excitement over 'the management of change' is not dead, as some maintain, claiming that it has been replaced by the Leadership of Change, Transformational Change, or Business Transformation; or that it has fallen victim to the assumption that the whole business can be handed over to the IT Department, who will come up with a new System.[1] In fact the idea of change management and its cognates – reform, restructuring, development, reorganisation and improvement – seems still to be in command of the educational imagination. Perhaps this is because education, and in particular Higher Education, has only recently risen to the top of New Public Management's agenda; perhaps it is because educationists tend to be slow with the latest jargon, picking it up just as everyone else is moving on. It is interesting to skim through the educational press and note how almost any story can be pitched as being about change. *Times Higher Education* included the following in one month of 2014. A complex story about a new university diversifying its provision away from Theology and Education, with a new vice-chancellor who is a former diplomat, with no previous experience of university management, was headlined 'New title holder intent on setting the pace for change' (the metaphor partly trades on a picture of the Olympic athlete Mo Farah, a recent alumnus). Ecuador hoped that a new campus 'will usher in a transformative research and innovation culture' (16 Oct). Three of the world's top 10 universities are in Britain:

‘sustaining a competitive edge, however, requires constant improvement and innovation’ (23 Oct). Dozens of similar examples could be cited.

The culture of academic journals is a particularly good guide to what ideas and slogans currently hold the centre ground. The *Journal of Organisational Change and Management* was founded in 1988. Similar journals include the *Journal of Change Management* (2000), the *Journal of Organisational Transformation and Social Change* (2004) and the *Journal of Strategic Change Management* (2006). Perhaps the only thing preventing further proliferation is the difficulty of coming up with a new title. The *Journal of Educational Change* caught up with the publishing trend in 2000, evidently a good year to foreground the theme of change. Its editor, Andy Hargreaves, began his first editorial with the rhetorical question, ‘What better time could there be than the opening months of a new Millennium to launch a major new educational journal on the subject of change?’ Special timeliness is indicated by the fact that ‘Nations, districts, leaders and sometimes teachers themselves are rushing to be on the leading edge of changes engineered by governments, fashioned by districts or financed by charitable foundations’ (p. 1). Furthermore the whole thing can be exhilarating: ‘Those on the leading edge of change can find the push towards the future to be an energizing, optimistic experience’ (*ibid.*). Really there seems to be no excuse for failing to join this particular in-crowd. Who would not want to practise the new ‘calculative science’ of change, ‘something you could plan and manage through models of effective schooling, planned cycles of managed change and predictable stages of implementation’ (p. 2)?

A colleague with considerable experience of applying for senior university management posts tells me that where the most predictable question used to be ‘tell us about your management style’ (the right answer apparently was ‘I don’t have just one management style’, followed by some account of the rich variety of your personal skills portfolio) the invariable question now is about your approach to the management of change. Here the correct answer is ‘I’ve learned that you cannot mandate what matters’, uttered with the ruefulness appropriate to one who has been through the same long and difficult journal as those on the other side of the table. Expand by explaining that complex change cannot be forced. Other good answers (it looks bad if all the candidates say the same thing) include ‘Change is a journey, not a blueprint’ (explain that change is non-linear, uncertain, often exciting and generally perverse), ‘Neither centralisation nor decentralisation works’ (more rueful smiles, but be quick to add that this means you need both top-down and bottom-up strategies), and ‘Every person needs to be a change agent’ (you cannot leave change to experts). My colleague is still looking for that

elusive management post, but he tells me that feedback on his interviews invariably compliments him on his understanding of the management of change.

Now of course no-one in the academy can be against genuine improvement. It is obvious enough that much turns here on the ambiguity of 'reform'. One of its connotations is of putting right something that is manifestly wrong, cleaning Augean stables and so on: this enables its other connotation, of simply changing things, casting them in a new form, to trade on the suggestion of bravely tidying the mess that has been inherited and setting a new and better order of things in place. This is especially useful for politicians, who naturally want to suggest they are doing better than their predecessors, and for the newly-appointed university leader who needs to demonstrate his or her immediate impact to the Chair of Council or their equivalent. Priests have exploited something of the sort in many cultures, persuading the gullible of the threat of divine disfavour in order to sell them the solution. Naturally talk of educational reform can also suggest possession of a vision of a bright new future, accompanied with (or perhaps consisting of no more than: see above) all kinds of up-to-date electronic accessories.

There are various oddities in this ubiquitous 'change talk'. One is its capacity to paralyse the critical faculties. Two of my colleagues, hearing that I was writing a paper on change in education, separately responded by saying that yes, good management of change is so important. Another oddity is that the shibboleth maintains its power despite the fact that most people have grasped that 'change' and its near-synonyms seldom if ever portend an improvement in people's working lives. Usually they mean there will be job losses, out-sourcing (often to whichever developing country can do the work most cheaply), increasing job insecurity, ever-higher targets, constant appraisal of performance, and less pay. Few employees, reading an email from Human Resources announcing a new programme of change and reform, think with excitement of the fresh opportunities (or 'challenges', as they will be called) ahead. Of course this is one more manifestation of the dehumanising doublespeak with which we are familiar. Making people redundant is 'immediate net headcount reduction' (from the University of Warwick Council Minutes, 15 May 2013: the context is the 'restructuring' of the University's Institute of Education). Killing civilians has been 'collateral damage' for some time; on the large scale, for instance by US drone strikes supposed to target al-Qaida in Pakistan, it is now 'mowing the lawn' (Monbiot, 2014), the grass which will grow back unless you go on mowing it. Thus drone strikes justify further drone strikes as surely as the grass goes on growing. The implied picture of a neat New

England house with a picket fence in front of the lawn does further helpful work here. Such 'doublespeak' was given its name by George Orwell: its function was to make some things harder to say and thus harder to think. Perhaps it is a regular feature of times of rapid and violent change. Thucydides famously noted how words changed their meaning in the civil strife that accompanied the long war between Athens and Sparta:

> Inconsiderate boldness was counted true-hearted manliness; provident deliberation, a specious fear; carefulness, the cloak of cowardice; to be wise universally, to be lazy in every particular. Inconsiderate passion was reputed a point of valour; but devising against another was held to be safety, being a specious pretext for averting his design. He that was fierce was always trusty; and he that opposed such a one was suspected. He that laid snares for another, if he succeeded, was a wise man; but he that could discover a plot laid, a more clever man than he: but he that had been so provident as not to need to do the one or the other, was said to be a dissolver of friendship, and one that stood in fear of his adversary.
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> (*History of the Peloponnesian War* III. 82, trans. Hobbes 1841, pp. 219-220)

What seems to be distinctive of modern times, however, is that where Thucydides describes the way words altered their meanings as a result of revolution, in our time language is deliberately – or at least semi-deliberately – twisted to bring radical change about. Indeed we could even think of this process as our own age's most characteristic way of attempting to bring about change. Academics will surely prove more compliant when they internalise the idea that they are part of the *workforce* rather than professionals, the latter term carrying the awkward suggestion of a measure of autonomy. In many universities what were formerly called *secretaries* have been re-named *administrators*: *secretaries*, after all, sound as if they merely support the work of others. Naturally their numbers grow, as if to remind the academics of the rightful order of things. Administrators are now 'in the majority at 71 per cent of UK higher education institutions' (*Times Higher Education* 3 Sept. 2015 p. 6, where they are called not 'administrators' but 'support staff'). Effecting change by altering language might seem a kindlier way than some of the strategies used in previous epochs, but people are still devastated by the termination of their careers, however much you reassure them that they are part of a necessary restructuring. The drones, while merely 'mowing the lawn', go on killing and maiming the innocent.

II

Michael Fullan is a prominent theorist of the management of change in education. One of his best-known books, *The New Meaning of Educational Change*, went through four editions between 2001 and 2007. Fullan's basic strategy, rather like Hargreaves's, is to assert that there is a great deal of change around in education, and since change is inevitable the best thing is to take part in it, signing up to the army of change-agents, working with change instead of resenting it as an imposition from outside. The way forward is to become persuaded that any proposed change makes sense: this is the 'meaning' of the book's title. The possibility that some changes are bad and should be opposed is discounted from the start, with a strange elision: 'It isn't that people resist change as much as they don't know how to cope with it' (p. xii). That is to say, what might appear to be signs of resistance are really signs of difficulty in coping. Genuine and, particularly, justified resistance is thus quietly removed from the picture. The strategy is given rhetorical support by many of the twenty-first century's fashionable terms:

> As we shall see, advances in cognitive science make meaningful the foundation for the new pedagogy of constructivism. Chaos or complexity theory leads us inevitably to the conclusion that working on 'coherence' is the key to dealing with the nonlinear fragmented demands of overloaded reform agendas. (xi)

In fact the book does not seem to have anything to say about either cognitive science or constructivism: certainly neither term appears in the index. Fullan appears to think chaos theory and complexity theory are identical, but they are not: the latter is a distinctive development of the former. In any case, both are comprehensible only to those with an advanced understanding of mathematics. Non-linearity in these theories is not the same as when we can all agree that reform agendas reflect absence of joined-up thinking, and is quite different from what 'justifies the existence of all managers', which has to do with 'instability, irregularity, difference and disorder' (p. 102). Perhaps all this constitutes too easy a target. In any case Fullan would probably reply with a version of 'it works': in his words, '"the meaning hypothesis" has become deeply confirmed' in the decade since the previous edition of the book (p. xi). Quite how it is confirmed he does not say: I suspect he means that lots of people agree with him, cite his writings and write positive reviews, but this does not amount to confirmation, deep or otherwise.

What I am concerned to emphasise is that in Fullan's writings educational change quickly leaves behind questions of just what changes are worthwhile and why. There is early mention of such ultimate goals as improving the lives of the disadvantaged, or producing 'citizens who can contribute to and benefit from a world that offers enormous opportunity' (pp. 6-7), but these are not explained or discussed – what is the enormous opportunity an opportunity for? – and in any case we hear little more of them. The meaning of educational change, to use his refrain once more, is that 'finding meaning in complex systems is as difficult as it is rewarding' (p. 19). Thus he echoes Hargreaves's assertion (above) that to be on the 'leading edge of change' can be an 'energizing, optimistic experience'. The purpose of working for educational change turns out to be for the intrinsic rewards of doing so. The means, change, has become the end. Perhaps this explains why there is little acknowledgement that some changes are entirely bad. The process will be fun whatever the outcome.

This can be seen with particular clarity in those who embrace Fullan's approach but are less careful than him in how they express similar claims. Joyce and Calhoun (1991), for instance, note that the management of change requires 'the creation of a different culture of educators who understand change and how to collaborate to bring it about...Protection of role-status and working conditions will have to take a back seat to a collective interest in excellence and equity' (399). They are responding to Fullan's earlier, 1991 text, *The Meaning of Educational Change*, before it became *New*. Neither equity nor excellence appear in the index of the latter. As for the effect on what Joyce and Calhoun call role-status and working conditions, this is only to be expected of 'reform', as I noted above, while deterioration of professional satisfaction and working conditions are not to be dismissed as merely self-protective reflexes. Deprofessionalised people do not necessarily make the best teachers or researchers. Then Joyce and Calhoun turn to the question of how all this is actually to be done. Their answer is revealing. 'First, by treating change itself as an innovation that requires substantial changes in the culture of educators'. This is another version of the now familiar point that you can't bring about particular reforms without turning education professionals into change agents and experts. Thus being an educator becomes first and foremost being a facilitator of change: a process that has apparently reached an advanced state at the University of the Arts London (see Section I above). Love of your subject, the pleasure you take in bringing on the next generation, your pride when they do well, now become secondary matters. This applies to everybody. Change only works 'where *everyone* becomes expert in knowledge about change' (p. 336, italics original). What is required is change in the manner less of acquiring

knowledge than of something like a universal religious conversion. Despite the apparently arbitrary reference to equity and excellence, a circle of mutual admiration embraces change, innovation and more change, with no room for anything else. The purpose of change is to become a manager of change. We should not be too surprised to find Management thus glorified.

III

One of the few dissenting voices among the cheer-leaders for change in the literature of management is Thomas Sergiovanni. He writes (2000, p. 57):

> Few topics are of greater interest to policy makers and to policy scientists than is educational change. Most of these elites assume that somewhere within the depths of this discipline lie the secrets that, once understood, can lead a school, state, or nation on the path to school improvement. The stakes are high. Finding the right change strategy promises victory in the national and even international brain race.

Sergiovanni thinks that 'something is amiss' with what he calls the discipline and practice of educational change. He too has noticed the deeply-rooted confusion of ends and means, or what he calls process and substance. To the enthusiasts for change, 'What seems to be important is not what the change is but how you change ... not leadership that blocks poorly conceived and potentially harmful change but leadership that "turns things around"' (p. 59). He is even prepared to say that 'we would be better off if certain change attempts failed rather than succeeded. If plans and ideas are simply bad, 'teachers who resist change may be heroes' (*ibid.*). It may be every bit as important to preserve what is valuable about the existing state of things as to engineer change.

Sergiovanni draws on Habermas's distinction between system and lifeworld (*System* and *Lebenswelt*). The lifeworld refers to the aspects of social action that make possible co-operation and mutual understanding, shared meanings, regular and stable patterns of action and dimensions of the individual's personality that are at least partly based in, and supported by, communal activities and institutions. In the context of education, as Sergiovanni notes, this points to the importance of 'the unique traditions, rituals, and norms that define a school's culture' (p. 61). System, by contrast, relaxes or replaces the demands of co-

operation and mutual understanding – of 'communicative action' – with other ways of sending messages. Chief among these are markets and bureaucracies, or to put it more crudely, money and institutional power. Here rules and procedures become dominant. In the context of schools, everything then comes to be driven by considerations such as public examinations, which in the lifeworld would be just one way of finding out whether the deeper values of the institution, such as a concern for the life of the mind, for the transmission of culture – for education, in short – were being properly upheld. In the lifeworld young people would choose universities partly by talking with students attending them or recently graduated from them, by visiting potential universities in order to have discussions with lecturers and professors, in the process refining their sense of what a university education might be supposed to be for. System sends out messages via league-tables of various sorts, including the employability of those graduating in particular subjects and from particular universities; by charging students substantial fees, to be repaid after graduation dependent on salary, it has another way of telling them that the purpose of going to university is to land a well-paid job. In the lifeworld sixth-form students are taught to read Jane Austen because her novels offer insights into the ways of becoming, and of failing to become, a grown-up human being; when they move on to university the students find their lecturers accessible and welcoming, ready to help them with problems to offer advice. In the world of system they read their schoolteachers' handouts, obediently highlighting the phrases that they are told will score marks in the exam; at university they find that some of their lecturers and professors are designated as 'academic advisors', who are expected to audit their 'employability skills' at the first meeting and suggest ways to polish their CV, for example by taking on a position of responsibility in student clubs and societies.

In summary, for Sergiovanni the way forward is 'to make change theory and practice more lifeworld sensitive' (p. 70). He quotes Lieberman and Miller, who write of a way of approaching change in education that

> respects diversity and confronts differences, that represents a sensitivity to and engagement with the whole life of students as they live it. The creation of new learning communities that include rather than exclude, that create knowledge rather than merely apply it, and that offer both challenge and support, provide the greatest hope for teachers who are in the process of transforming themselves, their world, and their work. (Lieberman and Miller, 1999, p. 91)

The distinction between system and lifeworld, whose echoes can be seen in the quotation above, captures something important. Yet there can be no guarantee that those in charge of organisations will not use such ideas to manipulate their colleagues (their workforce, as they will probably call them) while driving through the changes that they have already decided on out of commitment to values quite different from those goods internal to the idea of education and its intrinsic ends and purposes. Glib talk of 'excellence' or 'best practice', for instance, often suggests shared goals and ideals – for who can be against excellence and best practice? – while concealing quite other, typically managerial and administrative, imperatives (Glatter and Kydd, 2003). There is no solution for this except to be continually alert to it, as well as to remember Sergiovanni's point that some changes deserve to fail and should be resisted. Different ways of imagining change might also be helpful. I turn to this in the remainder of the paper.

IV

For much of European history, at least of those small portions of it with which I am reasonably familiar, the typical attitude to change seems to have been resistance and denial, coupled with nostalgia. For the Classical Greek poet Hesiod it was self-evident that change could only be for the worse. Successive ages of humankind had witnessed continual deterioration. In the Age of Gold people lived long lives 'without sorrow of heart'. The Silver Age at least gave human beings the possibility of playing like children for a hundred years. Even the men of the Age of Bronze were respectable in being strong and warlike and not deigning to eat bread, and many of those of the Heroic Age had the glory of fighting at Troy and seven-gated Thebes. But Hesiod and his contemporaries lived in the Age of Iron, their days never free from labour and sorrow and their nights haunted by the fear of death (*Works and Days* ll. 170 ff). Ovid gives a vivid picture in the first book of the *Metamorphoses* (ll. 127 ff, Melville's translation):

> Last came the race of iron. In that hard age
> Of baser vein all evil straight broke out,
> And honour fled and truth and loyalty,
> Replaced by fraud, deceit and treachery

And violence and wicked greed for gain.

For the Classical Greeks and for Republican Rome at least, then, the only positive change that could be contemplated was in the direction of the way of their ancestors, *mos maiorum*; and this was less a change, as we might think of it now, a matter of risk and uncertainty, than a return to what was secure and well-known. Christianity inverted the wretchedness of the Age of Iron, turning suffering, patience and humility into major virtues; systemic change for the better was not to be expected in this world. It is unsurprising that for millennia when the lot of humankind was violence, chronic disease, starvation and sudden death change was something to be feared. The image of the Wheel of Fortune, and lines from the medieval *Carmina Burana*, are emblematic: '*Rex sedet in vertice, caveat ruinam! Nam sub axe legimus: Hecubam reginam*'. The king sits at the summit of the wheel, but let him beware ruin! For below the axis, that is at the bottom of the wheel, we read the name of Queen Hecuba, who lived to see her city, Troy, burned down and her children killed. In some versions of the legend she went mad with grief. In one she was given to Odysseus as a slave, while in another, snarling and cursing him she suffered the indignity – or perhaps the merciful release – of being transformed by the gods into a dog.

For millennia change was seen for the most part as to be endured, certainly not engineered; and such attempts as might be made to engineer it could generally be relied upon to end in disaster. The execution at the end of the English Civil War of Charles I, a king widely believed to have been appointed by God, appeared to many a deed so contrary to Divine rule that the planets might cease to orbit the sun. Mathematicians laboured to discover the laws of gravity that would provide reassurance. A painting by Joseph Wright of Derby, *A Philosopher Lecturing on the Orrery* (1764-1766), offers a vivid image: an orrery is a mechanical model of the solar system through which its predictable and reliable workings can be demonstrated. In the end, to be on the safe side, Charles's son was recalled from exile and enthroned as Charles II, in 1660. The Revolution in France was accompanied by similar ambivalence.

The idea of planned, managed change seems to have entered the western imagination from a number of sources. One was the increased secularism that was a central aspect of Enlightenment thought. From here it became possible, and eventually natural, to think of a better life as something that might be found in this world and not, or not only, in the

hereafter. The British utilitarians such as Jeremy Bentham and John Stuart Mill were able to conceive social change and improvement as in principle a straightforward matter of cost-benefit analysis. We owe many ameliorations of the human condition to this line of thought, including more humane treatment of animals, children and convicts. It has also lead to some startling and reductive uses of modern cost-benefit analysis in environmental planning.[2]

Another major source of thinking about change has been the work of Charles Darwin. It is easy to forget that the title of his great book, *The Origin of Species*, was shocking to the Victorian public because it directly contradicted the widely accepted view that God had fixed the number of species for all time in the act of Creation. Remarkably, many readers managed to be shocked even though they had evidence of the extinction of species (for example, of the dodo, the last of which was killed in 1681) and were themselves bringing new species into existence by the breeding of animals, especially dogs and pigeons. Darwin drew attention to this in the first chapter of *Origin,*Variation under Domestication ('I have associated with several eminent fanciers, and have been permitted to join two of the London Pigeon Clubs. The diversity of the breeds is something astonishing...').

However Darwin has been widely misinterpreted in ways that have thrown up damaging ideas about change. The most simplistic, and entirely erroneous, of these misinterpretations is the Social Darwinism that supposes evolution amounts to 'the survival of the fittest' and justifies colonialism and racism. Interestingly, this involves the same elision of means and end that I drew attention to above. The process through which evolution favours those who are most 'fit', which is to say no more than those whom circumstances permit to thrive, becomes confused with an ultimate outcome, as if nature had a purpose and that purpose was to select the 'fittest' in the sense of those most vigorous and ruthless. (In fact evolution equally selects parasites, and the human child which survives many years of vulnerability precisely by being vulnerable and thus appealing to adults' protective instincts.)

Darwin was uncomfortable with the phrase 'survival of the fittest', though he used it in ch. 4 of *Origin* and the book's subtitle, *The Preservation of Favoured Races in the Struggle for Life,* did little to prevent misinterpretation. He reminded himself in a notebook never to write of 'higher' or 'lower' species. He did not suppose that evolution invariably moves in the direction of perfection, famously writing 'What a book a devil's chaplain might write on the clumsy, wasteful, blundering low and horridly cruel works of nature!' (Letter to J.D. Hooker, 13 July 1856). His last major publication was on the humble (as we might think of it)

earthworm: *The Formation of Vegetable Mould, Through the Action of Worms* (1881). There have been recent and persuasive attempts to argue that so far from urging us towards a mechanistic view of the natural world and playing a part in 'unweaving the rainbow' (the phrase is Keats's, from *Lamia*) Darwin can be read as a romantic, for whom the world of nature is enchanted and who re-enchants it for us:

> Darwin is stunned by the extraordinary variety and beauty of what he sees ... the concordance to the first edition of the *Origin* lists twenty-nine entries for variations on the word 'beauty', forty-two for 'wonderful', and fifteen for 'marvellous'. Perhaps equally important for the overall effect of the prose, there are fifty-seven 'unknowns'. That so much is unknown and yet to be discovered only increases the sense of marvel and wonder. (Levine, 2006, p. 243)

Above all, it is hard to read Darwin without the sense that for him the exuberant and constantly changing natural world is a delight. At the very end of the *Origin* he writes that there is 'grandeur' in the evolutionary view of life, 'and that, whilst this planet has gone circling on according to the fixed law of gravity, from so simple a beginning endless forms most beautiful and most wonderful have been, and are being evolved'. What Darwin gives us, then, is not just a complex theory of change but a vision of it that is capable of enriching and bringing a response from the imagination. It is as far from Social Darwinism's picture of change as it is from that offered by recent literature on change as a controlled and managed process; and, like other ways of thinking of change over the millennia it reminds us how simplistic recent ideas about change, particularly educational change, are.

VI

In Ovid's *Metamorphoses* Actaeon is changed into a stag by the goddess Diana as punishment for having watched her bathing naked. Her dogs then tear him apart. The warrior Ajax, failing to win the arms and armour of the dead Achilles in competition with Ulysses, plunges his sword into his own breast. From the turf onto which his blood has fallen there grows a hyacinth, whose petals bear marks resembling the letters that in Greek spell both Ajax's name and his cry of woe: AIAI. An elderly couple, Baucis and Philemon, shuffle around their cottage preparing a simple meal for their visitors, not realising they are Jupiter and Mercury in disguise. The gods reward them for their hospitality and simplicity of heart.

Revealing their identity, they ask the old couple what they most desire. Baucis and Philemon ask to die together at the same moment, as they have lived happily together for so long and neither could bear to live without the other. Their wish is granted. The cottage is turned into a gold-roofed temple, of which the old people are to be the guardians. Eventually the day comes when, worn out by age, they are turned into two trees growing side by side from the same trunk. From Ovid, *Metamophoses* VIII, 714-19 (my translation):

> Now Baucis saw Philemon growing leaves,
> Philemon noticed Baucis do the same;
> And as the tree-top's canopy began
> To grow over their faces, both at once
> while they still could, cried 'Oh, my dear, goodbye!'
> Just as the bark became, and hid, their lips.

It is easy to read these stories as charming fairy-tales linked by the theme of transformation. But Ovid is also offering his readers a distinctive way of imagining change. The *Metamorphoses* was written at a time when Republic had recently become Empire. Nostalgia was now politically dangerous: positive attitudes to the shift in the order of things were required. Thus Ovid doing was something quietly subversive in taking such a theme, treating it lightheartedly, and attributing transformations to the gods. For, as everyone knew, transformation was the rightful work of the Emperor Augustus and his senior Management of Change Team. We might compare magical realist fiction in our own time: a genre particularly associated with writers, such as Gabriel García Márquez and Isabel Allende, from oppressive regimes in South America.

Ovid completed the *Metamorphoses* in AD 8; in the same year he was exiled to Tomi on the Black Sea, on the sole authority of Augustus, dying there nine years later. Ovid himself attributed his fall to *carmen et error*, a poem and a mistake. Scholars continue to puzzle over quite what the poem and the mistake were (see for example Thibault, 1964).

NOTE

[1] Examples can be found by searching the internet for 'change management is dead'.

[2] It also leads to conceiving educational change as a matter of using data to identify teachers who have achieved good results, analysing how they have done it, and then sharing this with others: the approach recommended by the American Doug Lemov in his book, *Teach Like a Champion*, and adopted by the UK Teach First programme. This is of course a variant on the theme of 'best practice' that I have touched on above.

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